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# Hong Kong

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## Abstract

This article reviews the development of sport policy in Hong Kong. The focus is on the sport development in Hong Kong after it returned to China's sovereignty in 1997, including its largely independent international status as a legitimate non-sovereignty sporting participant which combines both the legacy of British colonisation and increasing interaction with Mainland China. In this article, Hong Kong's, to some extent, unique political system in particular its relationship with Mainland China under *the Basic Law*, government involvement in sport and its sports organisational structure and funding are introduced. In addition, its policy priorities and the balance between elite sport, the hosting of sporting events and mass sport, elite sport achievements and emerging issues most notably civil society's 'division' regarding the relationship with Mainland China and the function of sport in Hong Kong's identity shaping, social integration and its relationship with Beijing are discussed.

**Keywords:** Hong Kong; sport policy; *the Basic Law*; government involvement; sport organisations; emerging issues

## A Brief Introduction of Hong Kong and Its Political System

The 'Fragrant Harbour' (literal meaning of Hong Kong in Chinese, Williams 2009), a 1,104 square kilometre ex-British colony and current Special Administrative Region (SAR) of, and a 'major gateway to', China (GovHK 2013a), with a population of approximately 7.15 million, is 'the most visible and powerful non-sovereign entity in the international system' (Neves 2000, p, 272, quoted in Bridges 2012, p. 653).

Hong Kong's unique international standing has its historic pedigrees. The British started to occupy a part of Hong Kong in 1842 and fully colonised the region in 1898. British rule lasted until 1997, during which Hong Kong was occupied by Japan between late 1941 and 1945 (Williams 2009). After the handover in 1997, Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty and under the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle (GovHK 2013a), Hong Kong became China's first SAR, enjoying a high degree of autonomy.

Hong Kong is 'special' in a sense that according to HK's constitutional document - *the Basic Law*, it is autonomous in all areas except for diplomacy and defence and as the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle stipulates, Hong Kong could maintain its capitalist system for 50 years as opposed to socialism in Mainland China (The Central Government of the People's Republic of China 2013). According to *the Basic Law*, Hong Kong, as 'an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China' (Article 1), enjoys 'a high degree of autonomy' and independent 'executive, legislative and independent judicial power' (Article 2). However, the autonomy does not include foreign affairs and defence and Central People's Government is responsible for these two areas (Article 13 and Article 14). As regards the former, the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is in charge of the diplomacy of Hong Kong (The Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2013), but the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is authorised by the central government to 'conduct relevant external affairs on its own' in accordance with *the Basic Law* (Article 13).

### **Government Involvement in Sport**

Generally speaking, as Ho and Bairner (2012, p. 350) commented, Hong Kong is 'not well known as a sporting city'. However, it is undeniable that Hong Kong has evolved from a 'sporting desert' (Chen and Huang 2001) to a region that has achieved some sporting breakthroughs in the last two decades.

In general, British colonisers have left an indelible imprint on the development of modern sport in Hong Kong (Ng 1997). However, sport in Hong Kong inevitably blends 'ancient origins of Chinese physical culture' (Bridges 2012, p. 654) and other influences from Mainland China especially after it returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Critically referring to the periodisations of Ma (1997) and He and Dong (2002), sport development in Hong Kong can be roughly divided into four periods: 1842-1950, 1950-1973, 1973-1990 and 1990-2013.

Prior to the end of the Second World War, sport in Hong Kong was dominated and shaped by the imperialist element as local Chinese were largely excluded from sports activities (Ma 1997). After the cruel occupation by the Japanese, sport in Hong Kong welcomed a new period of development in the 1950s and the most noteworthy milestone was the establishment of the Amateur Sports Federation & Olympic Committee (ASF&OC, which became the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China, SF&OC, in 1999) in 1950, which was recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1951 as the official National Olympic Committee (NOC) representing Hong Kong (SF&OC 2013b). However, as Ma (1997) pointed out, the Hong Kong government was basically cavalier towards involvement in sport issues before the 1970s. 1967 was a turning point in Hong Kong's history and the riots in the late 1960s, most notably the 'Star Ferry riots' in 1967, prompted the colonial government to reconsider the role of sport (Bridges 2012). The Council for Recreation and Sport was created in 1973 and the rationale for its establishment was to ensure greater social order by providing an alternative, non-political and healthy outlet for 'releasing emotional energy and building responsible citizenship' (Bridges 2012, p. 654; see also Vertinsky, MaManus, Sit and Liu 2005). However, elite sport remained peripheral to the government's agenda.

The establishment of the Jubilee Sports Centre (JSC) in 1982 signalled the elevation of the salience of elite sport in Hong Kong. The JSC was reformed into Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) in the early 1990s (Chen and Huang 2001) and the HKSI later became the headquarters and engine of Hong

Kong's elite sport system. 1990 was a milestone in Hong Kong's sports history as Hong Kong Sports Development Board (HKSDB, evolved from the Council for Recreation and Sport), a quasi-governmental organisation, was established (Chen and Guan 2000; Ng 1997; Shuttleworth and Chan 1998). The sports structure of the colonial era remained largely intact after the 1997 handover and Hong Kong has retained its independent membership of international sport organisations, despite some domestic organisational changes most notably the incorporation of the HKSI into the HKSDB in 1994 (Chen 2006) and the abolition of the HKSDB and the transfer of its responsibility to the HKSI in 2004 (HKSI 2005). Moreover, many sports organisations including the SF&OC and many National Sports Associations (NSAs) added 'China' to their names after the handover and the official name of Hong Kong in international sport organisations became 'Hong Kong, China'.

Sport is also a government function specifically referred to in *the Basic Law*. Generally speaking, the previous sports structure remained unchanged and Hong Kong was allowed to develop its domestic sport independently of Mainland China. According to the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China (2013):

'The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall on its own, formulate policies on sport. Non-governmental sports organizations may continue to exist and develop in accordance with law'.

(Article 143, *the Basic Law*)

'Non-governmental organizations in fields such as education, science, technology, culture, art, sports, the professions, medicine and health, labour, social welfare and social work as well as religious organizations in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region may maintain and develop relations with their counterparts in foreign countries and regions and with relevant international organizations. They may, as required, use the name "Hong Kong, China" in the relevant activities'.

(Article 149, *the Basic Law*)

‘The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region may on its own, using the name “Hong Kong, China”, maintain and develop relations and conclude and implement agreements with foreign states and regions and relevant international organizations in the appropriate fields, including the economic, trade, financial and monetary, shipping, communications, tourism, cultural and sports fields’.

(Article 151, *the Basic Law*)

‘The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region may, using the name “Hong Kong, China”, participate in international organizations and conferences not limited to states ...’.

‘The Central People’s Government shall take the necessary steps to ensure that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall continue to retain its status in an appropriate capacity in those international organizations of which the People’s Republic of China is a member and in which Hong Kong participates in one capacity or another’.

(Article 152, *the Basic Law*)

Hong Kong’s independent membership of international sport organisations has continued and its special status is an application of the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ formula to sports issues. However, two points need to be noted: 1) Hong Kong delegations can use the regional flag (*Bauhinia blakeana*) in international sports events but according to the Annex 3 of *the Basic Law*, the national anthem of the People’s Republic of China would be played on official occasions such as flag-raising and medal ceremonies (see also Xu 2008); and 2) Hong Kong started to participate in the National Games of China immediately after the 1997 handover rather than the Commonwealth Games (SF&OC 2013a).

Elite sport has been developed in a more systematic and organised manner in the last decade with more substantial government and non-government financial and policy support. The rationale for government investment in elite sport is similar to that of many countries, namely to raise Hong Kong’s

international appeal and prestige and to match its sporting performance with its economic success; to inspire local people and generate local pride; and to promote social cohesion. As the HKSI (2006, p. 15) clarified, 'athletes' success in the international arena brings glory to Hong Kong people'. However, it is noteworthy that the development of sport in general and elite sport in particular is also pertinent to the building of a 'distinct Hong Kong identity' (Ho and Bairner 2012, p. 353) and its image of 'global citizenship' (Ho and Bairner 2012, p. 361). As Ho (2010) argued, national identity is often an ambivalent and uncertain concept to many people in Hong Kong and despite the seemingly closer relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China, many people in Hong Kong feel 'superior' (Ho 2010, p. 582) to Mainland China and many prefer a global identity rather than belonging to a nation state (Lau 2000, quoted in Ho and Bairner 2012, p. 353). The pursuit of a global citizenship implies a function for sport in relation to 'externalities', albeit that Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is not authorised to fulfil a diplomatic function. Taking advantage of its image of being 'a meeting place of East and West' (Bridges 2012, p. 661), Hong Kong tries to promote itself as a globalised trading and financial centre, or as expressed by the previous Chief Executive of Hong Kong Tung Chee Hwa (1999, quoted in Bridges 2012, p. 653) as 'Asia's World City'. Elite sport success and in particular the hosting of international high profile sport events perfectly serve this objective and resonate powerfully with the government's campaign to build 'a cultural hub' (Bridges 2012, p. 653). As the Leisure and Cultural Services Department's (2013) mission suggested:

'We aim to provide quality leisure and cultural services commensurate with Hong Kong's development as a world-class city and events capital'.

(Leisure and Cultural Services Department, LCSD, 2013)

## **Administrative Structure**

Hong Kong has established an increasingly mature system to deliver elite sport and the progress with its elite sport performance has been notable over the last two decades or so. According to Ma (1997) and Lau and Chan (2012),

Hong Kong's current sports system is mainly underpinned by four organisations: the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI), Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) and Sports Commission (SC). Figure 1 provides more details.

(Figure 1 here)

According to the latest policy initiatives of Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), 'the Government is committed to promoting sports development'. At the government level, Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) is responsible for youth development, sports and leisure, recreation and culture and arts in the HK (HAB, 2014a). It 'formulates and coordinates policy and legislation for developing sport in Hong Kong' (HAB 2014b). Six principle objectives have been identified by HAB:

- 'to raise the profile of sport and physical recreation in the community, emphasising the link between exercise, physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle';
- 'to coordinate the provision of high quality sports and recreational facilities';
- 'to encourage collaboration among different sectors of the community in fostering a strong culture in the community';
- 'to support and facilitate the implementation of initiatives which help make Hong Kong a major location for international sports events';
- 'to promote sports exchanges with neighbouring provinces and cities on the Mainland'; and
- 'to raise the standard and the profile of Hong Kong sport internationally' (HAB 2014b).

It is evident from these objectives that HAB primarily values the social and cultural function of sport as well as its role in bridging HK and Mainland China. Although the last objective concerns elite sport, it is argued that mass sport participation and leisure activities occupy key positions on HAB and the LCSD's (a branch department of HAB) agenda (HAB 2013; LCSD 2013).



On 1 January 2005, an advisory government body - the Sports Commission (SC) - was established to provide the government with strategic as well as funding advice on sport in Hong Kong. The responsibilities of the SC cover the issues of mass sport participation, elite sport and the hosting of major sports events and three corresponding subordinate specialist committees were founded: the Community Sports Committee (CSC), the Elite Sports Committee (ESC) and the Major Sports Events Committee (MSEC) (Sports Commission, SC, 2013b).

With respect to elite sport, HKSI Limited, as an official 'related government organisation' (similar to a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation, quango, in the UK) (GovHK, 2013b), primarily funded by the government, is the stronghold of elite sport in Hong Kong especially in relation to elite training (HKSI 2014a). Its responsibilities range from talent identification, education, sports science and medicine to information, coaching and funding (HKSI 2014b). It works in close conjunction with the SF&OC and NSAs in relation to elite sport development in Hong Kong. Founded in 1950, the SF&OC also plays a key role in the development of elite sport in Hong Kong especially in terms of Hong Kong's participation in major sports events including the Olympic Games, Asian Games and the East Asian Games (EAG) and the promotion of the Olympic movement in Hong Kong (SF&OC 2013b; 2013c). It is responsible for 'coordinating the development of local sports organisations' and currently, there are 75 member associations overseen by the SF&OC (HAB 2014b; SF&OC 2014a). It is noteworthy that the SF&OC is a recipient of government subvention (HAB 2014b). It is apparent from the function of the HKSI and SF&OC that quasi-government organisations play a vital role in elite sport development in Hong Kong.

In addition, the integral role of non-government organisations, most notably the NSAs in the development of each individual sport is also noteworthy. They are, in nature, non-government entities and governing bodies for their respective sports in Hong Kong. They are affiliated to the corresponding international and continental sports federations and the SF&OC. Many of them function in the form of a limited company (for example, The Cycling

Association of Hong Kong, China Limited, CAHK, 2014; The Hong Kong Football Association Limited, HKFA, 2014; Hong Kong Sailing Federation, HKSF, 2014). The NSAs are responsible for the selection of athletes representing Hong Kong on the international stage. Most NSAs were formed more than half a century ago (some even more than a century ago) and the commercialisation of the NSAs in Hong Kong was early (for example, the HKFA became a limited company in 1954, HKFA 2014) (see Table 1).

(Table 1 here)

In fact, non-government and market forces have long played a significant role in the development of sport in Hong Kong (Ding 2001). In addition to the prevalence of commercialisation of the NSAs, there have been thousands of registered sports clubs, entities and teams including many commercial ones, which play a particularly vital role in the development of community sport in Hong Kong (Chen 2001). The most notable example is the South China Athletic Association (SCAA), which was founded in 1908 with the establishment of the Chinese Football Team (renamed as the South China Football Club in 1910) and the activities of which have been expanded to a variety of sports (SCAA 2014a). It is a non profit-making sports organisation that is 'committed to promoting sports and fostering healthy citizenship' in Hong Kong (SCAA 2014b). According to Hao (2014), the SCAA makes an annual profit of approximately HK\$150 million (1 HKD is equivalent to approximately 0.09 GBP in 2014) which includes HK\$50 million from membership fees and nearly HK\$100 million of commercial revenues. In fact, it is a highly successful business entity with total assets of several billion HKD. Similarly, as the only legal betting agency in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) generates enormous profit each year and contributes a significant proportion of its revenues to youth welfare, recreation and sport (Shuttleworth and Chan 1998). Moreover, it also enlarges government's sport funding base by adding money to the subvention provided previously to the HKSDB and currently to the HKSI.

Another key feature regarding sport in Hong Kong is the support from influential family businesses or as expressed by Shuttleworth and Chan (1998, p. 40) 'commercial cartels of Hongks or trading companies'. For example, sport in general and elite athletes in particular have continuously received funds from individual foundations such as Li Ka Shing Foundation, Henry Fok Sports Foundation and Tsang Hin Chi Sports Foundation. In addition, many NSAs and other sport organisations are chaired or financially backed by these 'Taipans' (Shuttleworth and Chan 1998, p. 40), chairpersons or commercial tycoons. Of particular note is the influence and contribution of the Fok family. The current president of the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China, Timothy Tsun Ting Fok, has been an IOC member since 2001 and is the vice president of the Olympic Council of Asia (International Olympic Committee, IOC, 2013a; Olympic Council of Asia, OCA, 2013). The Fok family, most notably Timothy Tsun Ting Fok and his father Henry Fok, has been described as the 'rudder' (Yu 2009, p. 41) of sport and the 'head' of Olympic sport in Hong Kong (Xu 2007, p. 28).

## **Funding**

The sources of financial support for sport development in general and elite sport development in particular are diverse in Hong Kong but government grants form the most important part (Lau and Chan 2012). In addition, sponsorship most notably that from Hang Seng Bank (HSB) and Hongkong Bank Foundation (HBF), commercial revenues and funding from independent trusts such as the HKJC (He and Dong 2002; HKSI 2013b) also make a financial contribution to Hong Kong's elite sport development. The contribution of individual foundations is also worth noting as they have made substantial contributions to the development of sport in general and elite sport in particular in both Mainland China and Hong Kong. The main forms of financial support include cash rewards for excellent athletes and medallists at major international and regional competitions, financial support in the construction of major sports facilities and major sports projects, and annual funds provided to key sports organisations.

Table 2 shows a notable increase in income to the HKSI in the last decade. What is more noteworthy is the sharp increase in government subvention for the London Olympiad. The proportion of government subvention in the total income of the HKSI has been above 70% from 2006-2007 onwards. The proportion of government subvention further increased to more than 80% in 2012-2013 due to a dramatic increase in the Elite Athletes Development Fund (EADF) distributed to the HKSI. In comparison, although commercial and sponsorship income have constantly formed a part of HKSI's income, their proportion is far less significant.

(Table 2 here)

Funding allocation among NSAs is deliberately biased. Previously, eight individual and three collective sports<sup>1</sup> were identified as priorities and these sports together received HK\$26.9 million as opposed to HK\$5 million that all non-priority sports received for preparation for the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games (Chen and Huang 2001). The degree of specialisation and prioritisation was further intensified in the twenty-first century and the government has continued to allocate additional funding to the 'Major Four' - badminton, table tennis, cycling and windsurfing (HKSI 2010; 2011; 2012), with funding rising from HK\$5.6 million in 2009-2010 to HK\$8.18 million in 2011-2012.

The increased government concern with elite sport success is also evidenced in the increased degree of specialisation and amount of funding for elite athletes. The most notable example is the HK\$7 billion Elite Athletes Development Fund (EADF) established by the HK Government, which was launched in 2011 to replace the annual government subvention (HKSI 2012). The EADF contributed HK\$239.8 million to HKSI in the financial year 2012-2013, accounting for 72% of the HKSI's total annual income (HKSI 2013a).

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<sup>1</sup> The eight individual sports prioritised were badminton, rowing, squash, swimming, table tennis, tennis, wushu, sailing (windsurfing) and the three collective sports were basketball, football and rugby (Chen and Huang, 2001, p. 28).

Government support for elite sport tends to be concentrated on providing support for athletes and coaches and there are a number of financial programmes revolving around athletes and coaching. As for the former, various funding programmes and award schemes have been adopted to enhance athletes' morale. Examples include the Arts and Sport Development Fund (ASDF), Sports Aid Foundation Fund, Sports Aid for the Disabled Fund, Individual Athletes Support Scheme, Hong Kong Athletes Fund, Hong Kong Jockey Club Elite Athletes Fund (HKJCEAF) and Special Incentive Fund (SIF) for HKSI scholarship athletes mentioned above (HKSI 2005; 2006; 2008). In addition, there are special awards for medal winners in major competitions and the most salient example is the Hang Seng Athlete Incentive Awards Scheme. The scheme allocated HK\$1.11 million for awards to Hong Kong's medallists at the 12th National Games with a gold medallist receiving HK\$300,000 (4-traders 2013). More recently, Shun Hing Education and Charity Fund provided a total of HK\$500,000 cash reward to 11 athletes for their performance at the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games (YOG) (SF&OC 2014b). There are also cash awards provided by the HK government and according to Lau and Chan (2012), a gold medal at the 2012 London Olympic Games was worth HK\$3 million, although no one was able to win one.

As regards coaching, HBF has sponsored several coaching programmes including the Hongkong Bank Foundation Coach Accreditation Programme, the Hongkong Bank Foundation School Coach Education Programme, the Hongkong Bank Foundation Coaching Awards and the Hongkong Bank Foundation Coach Orientation Programme (HKSI 2005; 2007).

### **Policy Priorities and the Balance between Them**

The increasingly salient profile of sport in general since the 1970s and the elevation of the status of elite sport in particular, most notably in the last two decades, have been demonstrated in the previous section. Current development of sport in Hong Kong mainly follows three policy objectives identified by the Sports Commission (SC). They are 'promoting "sport for all"',

‘fostering high performance sports’ and ‘equipping Hong Kong to host international sport events’ (SC 2013a). Accordingly, three committees - the Community Sports Committee (CSC), the Elite Sports Committee (ESC) and the Major Sports Events Committee (MSEC) - were established inside the SC to fulfill these three objectives (Lau and Chan 2012). At least, rhetorically, they are three policy priorities for sport development in Hong Kong. However, in reality, the emphasis given to them is uneven.

What has changed most since the mid 1990s is the increased government concern with elite sport, which is evidenced in (1) the establishment and increased specialisation of elite sport-specific organisations such as the Elite Sport Committee (ESC) and the HKSI; and (2) increasingly substantial government investment including government subvention and funds in elite sport development, as noted in the funding section above. Government money granted to the HKSI was close to HK\$300 million in the financial year 2012-2013. The establishment of the HK\$7 billion Elite Athletes Development Fund (EADF) by the Hong Kong government has established a more stable financial basis for the long-term development of the HKSI (HKSI 2012). The EADF fund distributed to the HKSI surged from HK\$66.5 million in 2011-2012 to HK\$239.8 million in 2012-2013 (HKSI 2012, 2013a), which to a large extent reflects the government’s more supportive attitude towards elite sport development. Government’s positive attitude is also evident in the establishment of a series of sport funds including elite sport-specific funds such as the ASDF and SIF. In addition to the function of raising the profile of Hong Kong as a world-class city, elite sport success also takes on the role of producing meritorious high performance athletes to positively inspire the youth (SC 2013a). Hong Kong’s case echoes Houlihan’s (2011) argument that elite sport success has become the ‘irresistible priority’ in many countries.

Talent identification has been a salient area that Hong Kong targets. Despite a certain proportion of non-domestic sports talent employed in sports such as table tennis, badminton and rugby union (HKRFU 2013; ifeng 2010; Xinhuanet 2013), Hong Kong has paid attention to the cultivation of local talent and the Searching for New Sports Stars Programme is the best

example (HKSI 2005, p. 23). In addition, the Joint School Sport Training Programme has provided potential student athletes with much 'preferential treatment' as they are given the chance to be trained by veteran coaches from the NSAs (Lau and Chan 2012, p. 70; LCSD, 2014c).

Hosting major sports events has become another key priority as evidenced by the establishment of the specialist committee, the MSEC. According to HAB (2014a, p. 1), 'our vision is (to) raise the profile of sport by ... helping to attract more major international sports events to Hong Kong'. As the SC (2013a) explicitly stated, making Hong Kong an attractive venue for hosting major sports events can bring in 'more tourists and other economic benefits'. This reflects the Hong Kong government's emphasis on the hosting of sports events. Under this vision, an increased number of major international and regional sports events have been hosted in Hong Kong in the last decade. The most high profile sports event that Hong Kong has hosted was the equestrian events of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and Paralympic Games as a co-host city (Bridges 2012; Ho 2012; Ho and Bairner 2012). As Bridges (2012) commented, Hong Kong was proud of being part of the Olympic atmosphere. In addition, the hosting of Olympic equestrian events had a positive effect on Hong Kong's tourism (Li 2008). The most high profile comprehensive sports event hosted by Hong Kong was the 2009 East Asian Games (EAG) (Bridges 2011; 2012; HKSI 2010). As Bridges (2012, p. 653) argued, the hosting of the EAG was a significant reflection of Hong Kong's political objective of playing the role of a 'cultural hub'. Hong Kong applied to host the 2006 Asian Games but failed. As Bridges (2012) pointed out, the Legislative Council supported Hong Kong's bid for the 2006 Asian Games, expecting the return of elevating the status of Hong Kong to a centre capable of hosting international sports events and strengthening Hong Kong's international image, encouraging and motivating elite athletes and arguably increasing social cohesion. In general, the government has strongly supported the hosting of major sports events. The most salient example is the 'M' Mark Events Campaign (Major Sports Events Committee, MSEC, 2013a; People.com.cn. 2012). 'M' stands for major sports events and listed events enjoy commercial and often government funding support (MSEC 2013b;

People.com.cn. 2012). Up to 2013, 18 events had been listed as 'M' Mark, covering sports of volleyball, badminton, marathon, equestrian, tenpin bowling, squash, rugby sevens, golf, cricket and dragon boat racing (MSEC 2013a). According to the MSEC (2013c), the 'M' Mark System aims to:

Instill a sustainable sporting culture, foster a sense of pride and social cohesion, and to bring tangible economic benefits to our community.

Major sports events should also help enhance Hong Kong's image as Asia's sports events capital.

However, in comparison with other financial centres in Asia, such as Singapore, Hong Kong still lacks 'heavyweight' international sports events. Its image as a sporting city is still weak and there is still a long way to go to achieve its ambition of Asia's sports events capital. Furthermore, despite the government's generally positive attitude towards hosting high profile sports events, it is still at least, hesitant or conservative in using enormous public funds to host costly sports events, which is most notably illustrated by reference to the Hong Kong government's decision not to support the bid for the 2023 Asian Games, which was advocated and promoted by Hong Kong's sporting community most notably the SF&OC. This also reveals the lack of confidence among the public in the benefits of hosting major sports events (Bridges 2012).

As noted above, elite sport success and the hosting of international high profile sport events sit comfortably with the government's campaign of building 'a cultural hub' (Bridges 2012). As the LCSD's (2013) mission suggested:

We aim to provide quality leisure and cultural services commensurate with Hong Kong's development as a world-class city and events capital.

However, it is necessary to point out that despite substantial government support for elite sport and the hosting of sports events, the government is less willing to develop them at the expense of mass sport. As noted previously,



elite sport success is expected to inspire and encourage the youth to be involved in healthy lifestyle and hence elite sport is closely associated with social policy objectives. Furthermore, the Hong Kong government's refusal to support the bid to host the 2023 Asian Games was also, in part, driven by the fact that the public and many politicians questioned the value of the Asian Games for mass sport and argued that mass sport had not been given enough attention during the bid to host the 2006 Asian Games (Bridges 2012). In fact, 'promoting "Sport for All"' has been officially stated as the government's vision for sport development and the SC aims to create a sustainable and community-wide sporting culture whereby people of all age groups participate actively in sports in quest of sound physical and psychological health as well as positive community spirit (SC 2013a). The LCSD is responsible for the promotion of grass-roots and community sport in Hong Kong and a number of leisure programmes have been developed, ranging from District Programmes such as Community Recreation and Sports Programmes and District Age Group Competitions, Major Community Programmes such as Corporate Games, to Sports Development Programmes such as Young Athletes Training Scheme and District Sports Teams Training Scheme, School Sports Programme and Community Sports Club Programme (LCSD 2014a). At the same time, working in conjunction with the Education Bureau (EDB), the LCSD also promotes sport and physical education in schools, as evident in the School Sports Programme (SSP). The SSP, which is organised by various NSAs and funded and implemented by the LCSD and co-organised by the EDB and leading Hong Kong universities, targets all elementary, secondary and special school students in Hong Kong and aims to promote sporting activities among students and foster a sporting culture (LCSD 2014b). However, it is noteworthy that the SSP is not insulated from elite sport as the Joint Schools Sports Training Programme confers on students with potential the opportunity to be assessed and coached by coaches of the NSAs and to receive advanced and more professional training (LCSD 2014c). Hence, school sport also acts as a platform for talent identification and selection for elite sport in Hong Kong.

According to Lau and Chan (2012, p. 70), the 'LCSD is the core service

provider to promote mass sport participation' and some progress has indeed been made regarding mass sport participation in Hong Kong. However, it is noteworthy that despite the government's effort, on a global scale, Hong Kongers including many young people are still largely inactive and sedentary (Chung, Liu and Chen 2013; Vertinsky et al. 2005; Wong 1996, quoted in Shuttleworth and Chan 1998) due to a lack of a culture or tradition of physical activity and local Chinese communities' focus on study and academic performance (Bridges 2012; Shuttleworth and Chan 1998).

To summarise, the Hong Kong government tries to promote a balanced development of elite sport, mass sport and the hosting of major sports events. However, when possible conflicts occur the Hong Kong government takes a conservative view towards programmes and projects that require large amounts of public funds. This contrasts with the 'one-leg (elite sport dominant) system' (Hong 2011, p. 403) in Mainland China.

### **Elite Sport Achievement**

Compared to another Chinese-dominated Asian world financial centre and former British colony - Singapore, Hong Kong is more proud of its elite sport performance perhaps because of the Olympic gold medal won by Lee Lai Shan in women's windsurfing. According to Bridges (2012, p. 654), her success has inspired local people and greatly raised 'public awareness of local sporting achievement'. To date, as can be seen in Table 3, Hong Kong has won three medals (one gold, one silver and one bronze) at the Olympic Games (IOC 2013b). When it comes to the Asian Games, Hong Kong won its first gold medal in Seoul 1986 (Chen and Huang 2001; Xu and Li 1997) and has won at least one gold medal at each Games since Bangkok 1998 (SF&OC 2013a). At the most recent 2014 Incheon Asian Games, Hong Kong athletes won six gold medals and set a record by winning 42 medals in total (Incheon 2014, 2014).

(Table 3 here)

After the handover of the territory in 1997, Hong Kong competed in all five National Games of China and never returned without a gold medal (Liaoning 2013, 2013; SF&OC 2013a). Prior to 1997, as a British colony, Hong Kong participated regularly in the Commonwealth Games and won several gold medals. More recently, Hong Kong has made notable progress in the Paralympics. The delegation won a record of five gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Paralympics (HKSI 2009). In addition to the Asian Games, the East Asian Games (EAG) is another sports event that Hong Kong highly emphasises. Moreover, it is interesting to note that in spite of lying in the subtropical climes (GovHK 2013a), Hong Kong made its Winter Olympic debut in Salt Lake City 2002 and has continued to send a small delegation to subsequent Winter Olympic Games (Sports Reference, SR, 2013). The participation and medal success in these international and regional sports events gives Hong Kong valuable opportunities to raise its profile and have contributed to the promotion of Hong Kong especially in the post-handover period.

Much of HK's medal success comes from four sports - badminton, table tennis, sailing and cycling, and what is evident from this sports specialisation is a high degree of dependence on players imported from Mainland China especially in table tennis and badminton (ifeng 2010; Xinhuanet 2013). In addition to athletes, Hong Kong's national teams most notably the table tennis team have hired previous world-class Mainland Chinese players as head coaches (Xinhuanet 2013). Hong Kong's participation in the National Games, which provides Hong Kong athletes with an important competition opportunity, is another demonstration of, at least, the close connection between Hong Kong and the Mainland in terms of sport development. When it comes to non-Olympic sport, Hong Kong's long tradition in wushu shows a high degree of convergence with Mainland China. On the other hand, Hong Kong's success in cycling and sailing (windsurfing) and competitiveness in rugby union mirror continuing Western influences. As Ho and Bairner (2012, p. 350) argued, Hong Kong is 'geographically proximate to China' but has 'intimate ties to

colonial history and culture and exhibit[s] complex multilayered identities which have, in part, been structured by its colonial relationship with the British’.

### **Emerging Issues and Debates**

Similar to many other nations and IOC members, there is a perennial question regarding the balance between elite sport success, mass sport development and the hosting of major sports events in Hong Kong. As argued earlier, the salience of elite sport within the Hong Kong government has been significantly elevated and it is predicted that government support for elite sport will be continued in the future based on recent funding trends. The role of mass sport is still important and it seems that the government is reluctant to sacrifice the development of mass sport for elite sport success or for the hosting of high profile sports events. However, a question mark remains as to how the government can effectively enhance the sport participation rate in Hong Kong where there is a lack of a sport participation tradition or culture and one of the world’s highest rates of population density. With respect to the hosting of major sports events, the government’s rhetorical passion and support has been discounted due to its reluctance to use large amounts of public money most notably reflected in its refusal to bid to host the 2023 Asian Games. It is fair to say that the Hong Kong government’s support for the hosting of major sports events is conditional.

In addition, akin to Singapore where non-local athletes transferred from other countries have made a great contribution to elite sport success (Houlihan and Zheng 2014), there are debates regarding the adoption of non-local athletes most notably athletes from Mainland China and the need to cultivate local athletes as evidenced in the Searching for New Sports Stars Programme (HKSJ 2005). In fact, in sports such as table tennis, the NSA has already taken policy steps to cultivate local emerging talent (HKTTA 2008; 2010).

The tension between ‘importing’ athletes from Mainland China and developing local talent needs to be understood within the wider context of the developing relationship between the HK and Mainland China. The ‘Occupy Central’

protests in 2014, mainly led by student groups in Hong Kong and aimed of exerting pressure on the Hong Kong government and Beijing government to accept an equal suffrage in Hong Kong and a civil referendum on the voting system for the election of the Chief Executive of the SAR in 2017, has resulted in social turbulence. For sport, 'Occupy Central' could be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the impaired economy, social order and possibly more strict control by Beijing may influence the relatively independent development of sport in Hong Kong. Moreover, the relatively honeymoon relationship between the sports community in Hong Kong and that in Mainland China may be threatened by an increased degree of 'Mainlandphobia' within civil society in Hong Kong. However, on the other hand, possible consequences of the 'Occupy Central' protests aside, the protests and their concomitant social division are likely to make social cohesion a 'high-profile' issue within the Hong Kong government. Drawing on previous experience most notably government actions taken after the 'Star Ferry riots' in 1967, it is possible that the salience of sport will be further raised due to mass sport's widely accepted role in social integration and in regulating the behaviour of young people and the potential value of elite sport success and the hosting of major sports events in regenerating and restoring the pride and identity of Hong Kong.

In summary, the HK government has to manage the dual tensions (1) between the desire to use sport to strengthen internal cohesion through elite sport success and the desire to use sport to address a range of social and health issues in the HK, namely the balance between elite sport and mass sport development and (2) between using elite sport success to project a brand image distinct from China (as an Asian's World City) and 'global citizenship' on the one hand, and maintaining a positive relationship with Beijing on the other.

## **Glossary of Abbreviated Terms**

**ASDF** - The Arts and Sport Development Fund

**ASF&OC** - Amateur Sports Federation & Olympic Committee  
**CAHK** - The Cycling Association of Hong Kong, China Limited  
**CSC** - Community Sports Committee  
**EAG** - East Asian Games  
**EADF** - Elite Athletes Development Fund  
**EDB** - Education Bureau  
**ESC** - Elite Sports Committee  
**GAHK** - The Gymnastics Association of Hong Kong, China  
**GBP** - Great Britain Pound  
**HAB** - Home Affairs Bureau  
**HBK** - Hongkong Bank Foundation  
**HK** - Hong Kong  
**HKAAA** - Hong Kong Amateur Athletics Association  
**HKASA** - Hong Kong Amateur Swimming Association  
**HKD** - Hong Kong Dollar  
**HKEF** - Hong Kong Equestrian Federation  
**HKFA** - The Hong Kong Football Association Limited  
**HKHA** - The Hong Kong Hockey Association  
**HKJC** - Hong Kong Jockey Club  
**HKJCEAF** - Hong Kong Jockey Club Elite Athletes Fund  
**HKRFU** - Hong Kong Rugby Football Union  
**HKSDB** - Hong Kong Sports Development Board  
**HKSF** - Hong Kong Sailing Federation  
**HKSI** - Hong Kong Sports Institute  
**HKTTA** - Hong Kong Table Tennis Association  
**HSB** - Hang Seng Bank  
**IOC** - International Olympic Committee  
**JSC** - Jubilee Sports Centre  
**LCSD** - Leisure and Cultural Services Department  
**MSEC** - Major Sports Events Committee  
**NOC** - National Olympic Committee  
**NSAs** - National Sports Associations  
**OCA** - Olympic Council of Asia  
**Quango** - Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation

**SA-HK** - Ski Association of Hong Kong, China Limited  
**SAR** - Special Administrative Region  
**SC** - Sports Commission  
**SCAA** - South China Athletic Association  
**SF&OC** - Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China  
**SIF** - Special Incentive Fund  
**SR** - Sports Reference  
**SSP** - School Sports Programme  
**TriHK** - Hong Kong Triathlon Association  
**UK** - United Kingdom  
**YOG** - Youth Olympic Games

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